

NOT A FAIR GAME.

BY CHARLES BARNARD.



IF you little fellows are not careful you will be caught some day."

This is what an old bird said as he sat on the fence, one morning in June. The "little fellows" listened a moment and then they rushed off to their play in the fields. The sky was clear and

blue, and they could see any dangerous creature that might appear, while it was yet a long way off. They would have plenty of time to scurry away, to get home before it could catch them, or, at least, to hide deep in the bushes till it had gone.

"It's a queer world!" said one very small chap. "What with telegraph wires hung up in the most unexpected places, and the railroad with all the noise and smoke, and those terrible hawks, it does seem as if we could not have a minute's peace. It's 'look out there,' or 'run away from this,' or 'fly away from that,' all the time."

"Oh! I'm not afraid," said one youngster. "I did run into a telegraph wire the first day it was put up, but now I dodge them all."

"I never can abide the trains," said a small Miss, in speckled gray. "I know they do no harm, but they frighten me just the same, and I always fly away."

"I can stand nearly everything but the hawks," said one of the older ones in the party.

They all agreed nobody could abide hawks. If it were not for the fact that they could run and hide when the hawks appeared, life would not be worth living.

High in the air, wheeling slowly round and round in great circles, was a hawk looking sharply down on the country, spread out like a map beneath him. He could see the fields, the woods, the brooks and ponds, the roads, and the railway. There were chickens down in the farm-

yards. He must move slowly and cautiously so as not to attract attention and alarm the cock and hens. If he was careful, perhaps he could have spring chicken for breakfast. Suddenly he dropped, like a stone, out of the sky right into a farm-yard. Ah! They saw him and ran, and—oh!—there was a man with a gun! The hawk turned and darted into the air, while a shower of shot whistled after him.

How vexatious! No chicken this time. The sun was now more than an hour high and he had eaten nothing since the afternoon before, when he had caught a sparrow in a wheat-field. He circled round and round, keeping a sharp lookout for a breakfast. Ah! here was just the thing,—a whole flock of little birds holding a meeting in a field next to the railroad.

He steered off to one side and then made a bold dart right in among them. Away they flew in every direction and in a moment were jeering at him from the bushes. He sprang up into the air and sailed round and round, very hungry and in a discontented frame of mind.

The meeting of the little fellows resumed its session, and one small speaker made a brave speech about not caring for anything. He could get out of the way at any time. He was not the one to be afraid of—

Just then a train rushed by on the railroad and the meeting adjourned in a hurry. The speaker tumbled from the fence-rail and the audience scampered off quite demoralized by fright.

"Ha! ha!" remarked the hawk. "That gives me an idea! I'll have regular breakfasts after this."

He looked up and down the railroad for miles in each direction and saw a train coming. He flew that way and soon met it tearing along with a great uproar and much smoke. It was a trifle alarming at first, but he bravely followed it and found he could easily keep up with the cars, though the smoke made his eyes smart. He flew close behind the last car, right in the smoke and dust where he could not be seen. As the train rushed along, he could see the small birds scattering away on each side, frightened out of their wits by the noise and smoke.

Swoop! The train rushed on and sly Mr. Hawk

clapped his claws on a sparrow and then flew leisurely away to enjoy his breakfast.

Every one within a mile was on hand at the great indignation meeting at Cranberry Hollow. Blue and gray and black and red breasts—in fact, every little thing *on wings* in that part of the country.

It was dreadful! Perfectly shameful. The hawks had devised a horrible, a wicked trick. They flew behind railroad trains, and when the little birds were half frightened out of their wits and tried to run away in confusion, the hawks darted out from behind the cars and, pouncing upon the poor innocents, actually ate them up! Such a state of affairs could not be tolerated. It was monstrous, tyrannical, and very wicked on the part of the hawks. Resolutions declaring the practice an unfair one, and calling for its suppression, must be drawn up and sent by mail to all the railroad men, and copies must be presented to the hawks.

Just then a venerable tomtit rose in the meeting and remarked in a severe manner that, for his part, he thought they had just cause for indignation. The resolutions were highly proper and should be signed by all, but—reminding his hearers of the well-known fable of the rats, the bell, and the cat—he would like to ask who was to deliver the paper to the hawks.

A solemn hush fell on the assembled congress. Not a peep was raised. It was so still you could have heard a pin-feather drop.

Suddenly there was rush, a roar, and a blinding cloud of smoke. The committee had incautiously called the meeting too close to the railroad, and the assembly suddenly broke up in the wildest disorder and confusion.

Two minutes later a savage hawk with cruel claws was seated on the fence enjoying a breakfast and waiting for the next train, that he might repeat his wicked tricks.

Such is bird life!

